

Personal Learning Networks and Your Personal Expertise

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One of the great blessings and also a curse of the Internet is the opportunity to tune in on what both expert and novice voices are saying about teaching and learning.

The problem for all of us is what voices do we listen to and for how much time each day. Since we could spend our entire day reading, listening to, and viewing the massive amounts of information coming at us, it is a challenge for each of us to be selective and to limit what comes into our heads.

For teacher librarians, it is easy to become insular and narrow by just listening to voices within our field. Such a practice is called "siloining" by experts who realize how easy it is to become very narrow. Siloining is actually enabled these days by Google as its search engine learns to deliver to us what it thinks we want. That is why two exact searches done by different persons will produce different results. If we are liberal or conservative, or Catholic or Buddhist, or like Apple or Android, Google figures this out and gives us a steady diet of our preferences.

For our profession, we need a much broader view of education, teaching, and learning, plus information about the various disciplines being taught in the classroom. We have prided ourselves as reference librarian superstars that we "may not know anything," but give us five minutes and we can find the answers. So, while we develop expertise in both library science and educational technology, we need to consciously reach out to other voices so that we can participate in the conversations going on in our schools.

So what strategies do we use in our limited time to both specialize and generalize at the same time? One useful technique is to get a sense of what voices prominent folks in our profession listen to. What voices do Joyce Valenza or Will Richardson, or David Warlick or Richard Byrne interact with? Actually these people detail for us who they listen to and there are actually lists of the best blogs or voices in many fields that are published regularly.

Each of us needs to develop our own personal set of voices and we all need to consciously build variety so that our own ideas are both informed and challenged.

What do I like? What do you like? I appreciate folks who gather together a variety of ideas, research, strategies, and trends into succinct models that explain major concepts with which I am either a novice at or even somewhat of an expert. I have my list of personal interests such as collaborative intelligence, deep learning, collaborative technologies, learning science, Web 2.0 tools and other topics of interest to organizations such as AASL, ISTE, ASCD, NCTE, IRA, and including ideas from disciplines organizations like NSTA. You will have create your own list and we all want to keep our eyes out for new and better voices to inform us.

I thought I would review just a few of my favorites for this column. Perhaps you might enjoy a few of these and share with me at reader.david@gmail.com others you enjoy and are informed by. So, here is my list:

The screenshot shows the website for the 21st Century Fluency Project. The main article is titled "Readers rapidly gravitate to e-books" and is dated January 12, 2013. The article discusses a survey showing that Americans' obsession with digital tablets is driving a boom in book reading, with a 23 percent increase in e-book sales and a 16 percent increase in total book sales. It also mentions that the number of adults who read printed books fell to 67 percent from 72 percent, and that the shift to e-books was driven by the popularity of tablets and e-reader devices.

Your Committed Sardine Blog, a product of the 21st Century Fluency Project, is created by Ian Jukes, Lee Crockett, and Jason Ohler. They do seminars, publish books, and this is their condensation of major ideas in technology and education. For example,

The screenshot shows the website for MindShift, with the tagline "How we will learn." The main article is titled "Shifting Tactics: Rocketship Will Change Its Computer Lab Model" and is dated January 23, 2013. The article discusses how Rocketship Education is changing its computer lab model. Other articles visible include "Guide to Mobile Learning" and "About MindShift".

they condensed a research study about the rising use of eBooks by young people at: <http://tinyurl.com/b6af5zz> They give the source so it is easy to follow up on the original.

Mind/Shift: How We Will Learn (<http://blogs.kqed.org/mindshift/>) is a curated group of short reports, trends, and ideas about cutting edge ideas in education done by Tina Barseghian. The free

subscriptions will provide one or two short pieces to tickle the mind and connect you with education thought and trends. For example, we enjoyed the essay on Deeper Learning at: <http://tinyurl.com/bjfzdf> that discusses a report by the National Research Council.

TeachThought is an example of short pithy pieces that gather and present summaries or lists of solutions to educational

problems. For example, we enjoyed a 36 point list of easy strategies to assess deep understanding by kids and teens at: <http://tinyurl.com/aveteqf>. Such lists can be handy when planning collaboratively with a teacher as we both make judgments about whether kids are learning what we think we are teaching. TeachThought produces a constant stream of such nuggets that we can circulate to interested teachers and administrators.

TED ED/TED Talks: TED talks have become famous for bringing us short video presentations by a wide range of "idea" folks across many fields. If you subscribe to TED and its focused TED ED collections, you get a constant stream of ideas worth harvesting. One example we enjoyed recently at: <http://tinyurl.com/oqzcr84> is a talk about creativity by Charles Leadbeater that encourages us as Teacher Librarians to provide the environment in our Learning Commons where creativity, innovation, and collaborative intelligence is cultivated. Such ideas keep reminding us to build both formal education and informal education into our programs.

The Future of Education; or, Library 2.0 These two large groups of educators and librarians are headed by Steve Hargadon. By subscribing to either, you will receive Steve's regular announcements of hour-long webinars with major education book authors. Because Steve is such an astute interviewer, you can get an in-depth sense of the message that the book conveys and then can follow up if interested. Steve interviews folks who write about constructivist topics rather than traditional education. In the announcements he sends out, you can be selective in the types of people you want to hear. He archives all the interviews so you can search for a favorite author among the 3,000 or so interviews to find a program of interest. Steve also conducts the Library 2.0 conference for San Jose State University School of Library and Information Science that will be in October, 2013. It should be worth your time to present or just listen in on this global event.

Eudotopia continues to be a good source for teachers on both news and substantial

The screenshot shows the Edutopia website interface. At the top, the 'DEEPER LEARNING' logo is prominent with the tagline 'What every child needs. What every child deserves.' Below the logo, navigation tabs include 'About Us', 'Browse by Grade Level', 'Schools That Work', 'Blogs', 'Videos', and 'Classroom Guides'. A search bar is located in the upper right. The main content area features a featured article titled 'DEEPER LEARNING: Why Cross-Curricular Teaching is Essential' by Dr. Johnson Robertson, dated January 15, 2013. The article includes a photo of a man sitting on a couch in a library setting. To the right of the article is a sidebar with 'Multiple Blog Topics' such as Administrators, Assessment, Brain-Based Learning, Education Trends, Five-Minute Film Festival, Game-Based Learning, and Project-Based Learning. Social media sharing options for Facebook, Twitter, and Print are visible.

ideas for teaching and learning. We particularly enjoyed a review of ideas to increase deep learning at: <http://tinyurl.com/aqmrk37> that are useful background to the idea that collaborative learning experiences can boost learning in ways that the isolated teacher in the isolated classroom has difficulty duplicating.

Professional Association Blogs/Newsletters: Most professional associations publish newsletters that spotlight research studies that are informative beyond their members. By linking into the various associations to which your faculty belong, you are likely to encounter studies that are food for discussion with your colleagues. For example, the National Center for Literacy Education (NCLE) drew attention recently to a research study by Richard Allington about the effectiveness of computer-based reading programs at: <http://tinyurl.com/azmmwcn>.¹ By contrasting Allington's ideas with those of Steven Krashen, reading teachers, teacher librarians, and classroom teachers can continue to investigate what works with readers in your school by asking what blend of strategies seem to work with different kinds of struggling readers. Teacher librarians can gain confidence that

our time-tested strategy of supplying piles of fascinating reading to each reader is still a technique worth pursuing.

As with all voices begging for attention, I am very selective and critical as I build my own perspective. And, I think that this is our own attempt as professionals to continue our journey along the information literacy path. Perhaps you are as shocked as I am with the conspiracy theorists and just plain uninformed folks who continually draw unsubstantiated positions built on soft or downright inaccurate information. One challenge, I notice, of the Common Core Standards is that we help young people develop substantiated ideas, positions, arguments and to gain a wider perspective. It was the hope of Thomas Jefferson that an informed citizenry would keep a democracy afloat even though we all might disagree on major issues confronting our schools, our communities, and our nation. So, when I encounter folks on Facebook that dispute whether Sandy Hook and the Aurora shootings actually occurred, I see a continued role for us as teacher librarians in this world of information. Who are you listening to?

¹ The Allington studies are cited by Peter DeWitt in an *Education Week* article: "The Myth about Computer-Based Reading Software?" published January 22, 2013 and then reported by NCLE in their newsletter.

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